
GENESIS 40:1 After these things, the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

Pharaoh's chief butler and his chief baker, having offended their lord, are put in prison, Gen 40:1-3. The captain of the guard gives them into the care of Joseph, Gen 40:4. Each of them has a dream, Gen 40:5. Joseph, seeing them sad, questions them on the subject, Gen 40:6, Gen 40:7. Their answer, Gen 40:8. The chief butler tells his dream, Gen 40:9-11. Joseph interprets it, Gen 40:12, Gen 40:13. Gives a slight sketch of his history to the chief butler, and begs him to think upon him when restored to his office, Gen 40:14, Gen 40:15. The chief baker tells his dream, Gen 40:16, Gen 40:17. Joseph interprets this also, Gen 40:18, Gen 40:19. Both dreams are fulfilled according to the interpretation, the chief butler being restored to his office, and the chief baker hanged, Gen 40:20-22. The chief butler makes no interest for Joseph, Gen 40:23.

Verse 1

The butler - מִשְׁקֵה mashkeh, the same as saky among the Arabians and Persians, and signifying a cup-bearer.

Baker - אֹפֶה opheh; rather cook, confectioner, or the like.

Had offended - They had probably been accused of attempting to take away the king's life, one by poisoning his drink, the other by poisoning his bread or confectionaries.

GENESIS 40:2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cup bearer and the chief baker.

GENESIS 40:3 He put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

Verse 3

Where Joseph was bound - The place in which Joseph was now confined; this is what is implied in being bound; for, without doubt, he had his personal liberty. As the butler and the baker were state criminals they were put in the same prison with Joseph, which we learn from the preceding chapter, Gen 39:20, was the king's prison. All the officers in the employment of the ancient kings of Egypt were, according to Diodorus Siculus, taken from the most illustrious families of the priesthood in the country; no slave or common person being ever permitted to serve in the presence of the king. As these persons, therefore, were of the most noble families, it is natural to expect they would be put, when accused, into the state prison.

GENESIS 40:4 The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he took care of them. They stayed in prison many days.

Verse 4

They continued a season - ימים yamim, literally days; how long we cannot tell. But many suppose the word signifies a complete year; and as Pharaoh called them to an account on his birthday, Gen 40:20, Calmet supposes they had offended on the preceding birthday, and thus had been one whole year in prison.

GENESIS 40:5 They both dreamed a dream, each man his dream, in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the cup bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were bound in the prison.

Verse 5

Each man according to the interpretation - Not like dreams in general, the disordered workings of the mind, the consequence of disease or repletion; these were dreams that had an interpretation, that is, that were prophetic.

GENESIS 40:6 Joseph came in to them in the morning, and saw them, and saw that they were sad.

Verse 6

They were sad - They concluded that their dreams portended something of great importance, but they could not tell what.

GENESIS 40:7 He asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you look so sad today?"

GENESIS 40:8 They said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it." Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Please tell it to me."

Verse 8

There is no interpreter - They either had access to none, or those to whom they applied could give them no consistent, satisfactory meaning.

Do not interpretations belong to God? - God alone, the Supreme Being, knows what is in futurity; and if he have sent a significant dream, he alone can give the solution.

GENESIS 40:9 The chief cup bearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream, behold, a vine was in front of me,

GENESIS 40:10 and in the vine were three branches. It was as though it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters produced ripe grapes.

GENESIS 40:11 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand."

Verse 11

And I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup - From this we find that wine anciently was the mere expressed juice of the grape, without fermentation. The saky, or cup-bearer, took the bunch, pressed the juice into the cup, and instantly delivered it into the hands of his master. This was anciently the יין yain of the Hebrews, the οἶνος of the Greeks, and the mustum of the ancient Latins.

GENESIS 40:12 Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days.

Verse 12

The three branches are three days - That is, The three branches signify three days; so, this is my body, that is, this bread signifies or represents my body; this cup is my blood, Represents my blood; a form of speech frequently used in the sacred writings, for the Hebrew has no proper word by which our terms signifies, represents, etc., are expressed; therefore it says such a thing is, for represents, points out, etc. And because several of our ancestors would understand such words in their true, genuine, critical, and sole meaning, Queen Mary, Bishops Gardiner, Bonner, and the rest of that demoniacal crew, reduced them to ashes in Smithfield and elsewhere!

GENESIS 40:13 Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head, and restore you to your office. You will give Pharaoh's cup into his hand, the way you did when you were his cup bearer.

GENESIS 40:14 But remember me when it will be well with you, and please show kindness to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.

Verse 14

Make mention of me unto Pharaoh - One would have supposed that the very circumstance of his restoration, according to the prediction of Joseph, would have almost necessarily prevented him from forgetting so extraordinary a person. But what have mere courtiers to do either with gratitude or kindness?

GENESIS 40:15 For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

Verse 15

For indeed I was stolen - גנב גנבתי gunnob gunnobi, stolen, I have been stolen - most assuredly I was stolen; and here also have I done nothing. These were simple assertions, into the proof of which he was ready to enter if called on.

GENESIS 40:16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream, and behold, three baskets of white bread were on my head.

GENESIS 40:17 In the uppermost basket there were all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

GENESIS 40:18 Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days.

GENESIS 40:19 Within three more days, Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you, and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from off you."

Verse 19

Lift up thy head from off thee - Thus we find that beheading, hanging, and gibbeting, were modes of punishment among the ancient Egyptians; but the criminal was beheaded before he was hanged, and then either hanged on hooks, or by the hands. See Lam 5:12.

GENESIS 40:20 On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and he lifted up the head of the chief cup bearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.

Verse 20

Pharaoh's birthday - The distinguishing a birthday by a feast appears from this place to have been a very ancient custom. It probably had its origin from a correct notion of the immortality of the soul, as the commencement of life must appear of great consequence to that person who believed he was to live for ever. St. Matthew (Mat 14:6) mentions Herod's keeping his birthday; and examples of this kind are frequent to the present time in most nations.

Lifted up the head of the chief butler, etc. - By lifting up the head, probably no more is meant than bringing them to trial, tantamount to what was done by Jezebel and the nobles of Israel to Naboth: Set Naboth on high among the people; and set two men, sons of Belial, to bear witness against him, etc.; 1Kgs 21:9, etc. The issue of the trial was, the baker alone was found guilty and hanged; and the butler, being acquitted, was restored to his office.

GENESIS 40:21 He restored the chief cup bearer to his position again, and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand;

GENESIS 40:22 but he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

GENESIS 40:23 Yet the chief cup bearer didn't remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Verse 23

Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph - Had he mentioned the circumstance to Pharaoh, there is no doubt that Joseph's case would have been examined into, and he would in consequence have been restored to his liberty; but, owing to the ingratitude of the chief butler, he was left two years longer in prison.

Many commentators have seen in every circumstance in the history of Joseph a parallel between him and our blessed Lord. So, "Joseph in prison represents Christ in the custody of the Jews; the chief butler and the chief baker represent the two thieves which were crucified with our Lord; and as one thief was pardoned, and the other left to perish, so the chief butler was restored to his office, and the chief baker hanged." I believe God never designed such parallels; and I am astonished to find comparatively grave and judicious men trifling in this way, and forcing the features of truth into the most distorted anamorphosis, so that even her friends blush to acknowledge her. This is not a light matter; we should beware how we attribute designs to God that he never had, and employ the Holy Spirit in forming trifling and unimportant similitudes. Of plain, direct truth we shall find as much in the sacred writings as we can receive and comprehend; let us not therefore hew out unto ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Interpretations of this kind only tend to render the sacred writings uncertain; to expose to ridicule all the solemn types and figures which it really contains; and to furnish pretexts to infidels and irreligious people to scoff at all spirituality, and lead them to reject the word of God entirely, as incapable of being interpreted on any fixed or rational plan. The mischief done by this system is really incalculable. See the observations on Genesis 37 (note).